Se 9/986

background notes

Seychelles

United States Department of State
Bureau of Public Affairs

April 1986

NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY
JUL 22 1986
U. S. GOVT. PUBS.
DEPOSITORY 376

Official Name:
Republic of Seychelles

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun (sing. and pl.)*—Seychellois. *Adjective*—Seychellois. **Population** (1985): 65,000. **Annual growth rate:** 1.0%. **Ethnic group:** Creole (mixture of Asians, Africans, and Europeans). **Religions:** Roman Catholic 90%, Anglican 8%, other 2%. **Languages:** Creole 94%, English and French (official). **Education:** *Years compulsory*—9. *Attendance*—95%. *Adult literacy*—80%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—15/1,000. *Life expectancy*—66 yrs. **Work force** (25,000): *Agriculture*—18.5%. *Industry and commerce*—19%. *Services*—13.5%. *Government (including parastatals)*—49%.

Geography

Area: 444 sq. km. (171 sq. mi.). **Cities:** *Capital*—Victoria (pop. 23,156). **Terrain:** The inhabited granite islands have narrow coastal littorals from which rise central ranges of hills and mountains up to 900 m. (3,000 ft.). **Climate:** Tropical maritime.

Government

Type: Single-party republic. **Independence:** June 29, 1976. **Constitution:** June 1979.

Branches: *Executive*—president (chief of state and head of government). *Legislative*—unicameral People's Assembly with 23 elected members and several appointed members. *Judicial*—Supreme Court, Appeals Court.

Political party: Seychelles People's Progressive Front (SPPF). **Suffrage:** Universal over 18.

Central government budget (1985): $65 million.

Defense (1983 est.): 11.77% of government budget.

National holidays: June 5, June 29.

Flag: Red, white, and green; red upper portion separated from lower green portion by a white, wavy stripe.

Economy

GDP (1985 est.): $140 million. **Annual growth rate** (1984): 1.8%. **Per capita income:** $2,100. **Avg. inflation rate** (last 4 yrs.): 6.5%.

Natural resources: Fish, copra, spices.

Agriculture (including fishing, 7.1% of GDP): *Products*—copra, cinnamon, tuna.

Industry (15% of GDP): *Types*—tourism, reexports, copra, and vanilla processing.

Trade (1984): *Exports*—$4.3 million: copra, fish, cinnamon. *Imports*—$70.9 million: machinery, food, petroleum. *Major partners*—Pakistan, UK, India, Kenya, Mauritius, South Africa, Singapore, Bahrain.

Official exchange rate (Feb. 1983 avg.): 7.5 rupees = US$1.

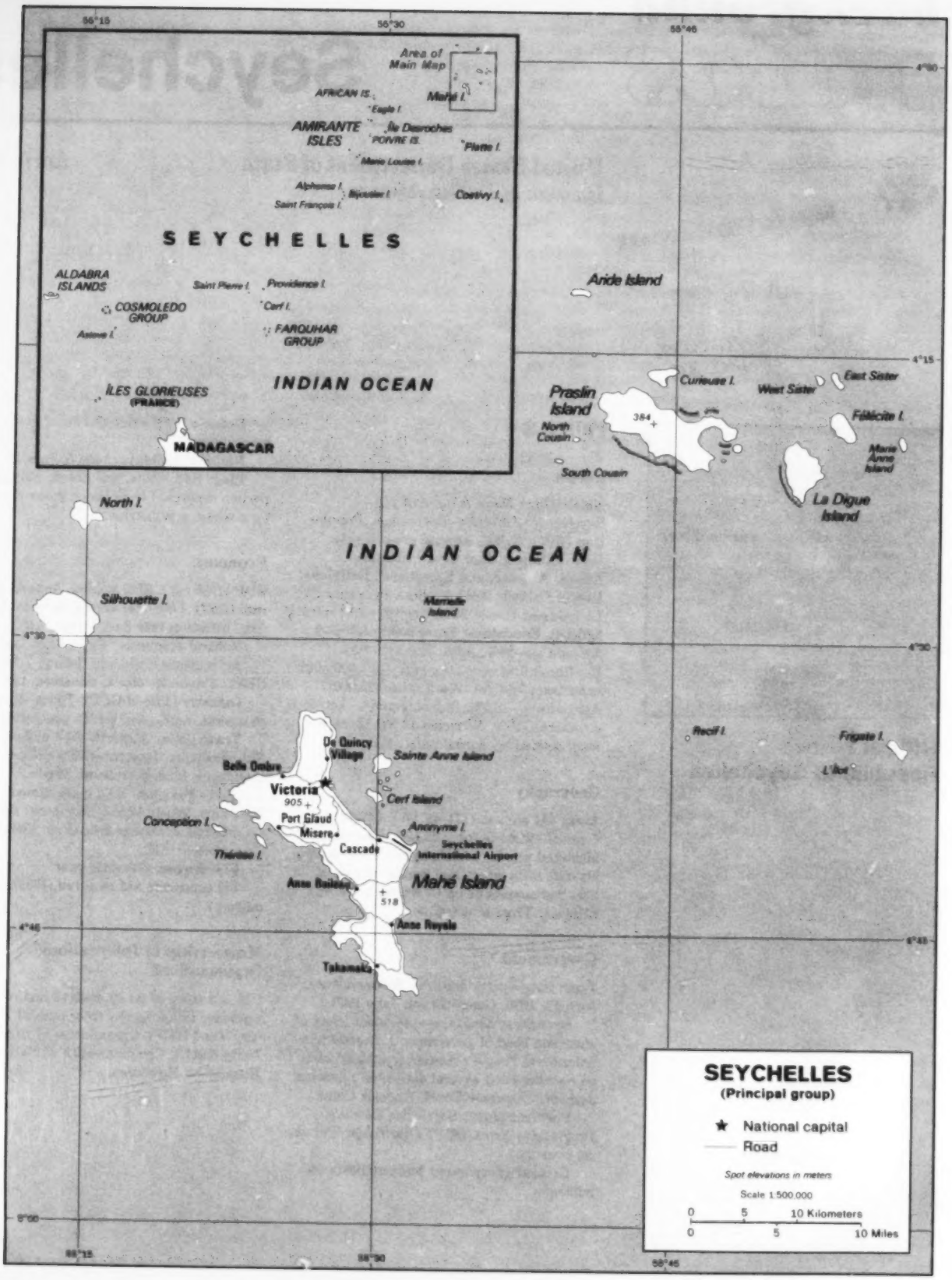
Fiscal year: Calendar year.

US economic aid received (1985): $2.43 million.

Membership in International Organizations

UN and some of its specialized and related agencies, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF); Organization of African Unity (OAU); Commonwealth of Nations; Nonaligned Movement.

S1.123:


55°15
55°30
55°45
4°00
4°15
4°30
4°45
5°00
Area of Main Map
AFRICAN IS.
Mahé I.
Eagle I.
AMIRANTE ISLES
Ile Desroches
POIVRE IS.
Platte I.
Marie Louise I.
Alphonse I.
Bijoutier I.
Coetivy I.
Saint François I.
SEYCHELLES
ALDABRA ISLANDS
Saint Pierre I.
Providence I.
Cerf I.
COSMOLEDO GROUP
Astove I.
FARQUHAR GROUP
ILES GLORIEUSES (FRANCE)
INDIAN OCEAN
MADAGASCAR
Aride Island
Praslin Island
384
Curieuse I.
West Sister
East Sister
Félicite I.
Marie Anne Island
North Cousin
South Cousin
La Digue Island
North I.
INDIAN OCEAN
Silhouette I.
Mamelle Island
Recif I.
Frigate I.
L'Ilot
De Quincy Village
Belle Ombre
Sainte Anne Island
Victoria
905
Cerf Island
Port Glaud
Misere
Conception I.
Thérèse I.
Anonyme I.
Cascade
Seychelles International Airport
Anse Boileau
Mahé Island
518
Anse Royale
Takamaka
SEYCHELLES
(Principal group)
National capital
Road
Spot elevations in meters
Scale 1:500,000
0 5 10 Kilometers
0 5 10 Miles

Center of Mahe Island looking north.

GEOGRAPHY

Seychelles is located in the Indian Ocean about 1,600 kilometers (1,000 mi.) east of Kenya. The nation comprises an archipelago of 92 beautiful, tropical islands.

Seychelles includes two distinct collections of islands, some granitic, some of coral origin. The Mahe group consists of 40 granite islands, all within a 56-kilometer (35-mi.) radius of the main island of Mahe. These islands are rocky, and most have a narrow coastal strip and a central range of hills rising as high as 914 meters (3,000 ft.). Mahe is the largest island (142 sq. km.—55 sq. mi.) and is the site of Victoria, the capital. The coral islands are flat with elevated coral reefs at different stages of formation. The coral islands have no fresh water and can sustain human life only with difficulty.

The climate is equable and healthy, although quite humid, as the islands are small and subject to marine influences. Temperatures on Mahe vary from 24°C to 29°C (75°F–85°F), and rainfall ranges from 288 centimeters (90 in.) annually at Victoria to 355 centimeters (140 in.) on the mountain slopes. Precipitation is somewhat less on the other islands. The cooler season occurs during the southeast monsoon period, which begins in late May and continues until September. Seychelles lies outside the cyclone belt, so high winds are rare.

READEX FICHE

PEOPLE

About 90% of the Seychellois people live on Mahe Island. Most others live on Praslin and La Digue, with the remaining smaller islands either sparsely populated or uninhabited.

Most Seychellois are descendants of early French settlers and the African slaves brought to the Seychelles in the 19th century by the British, who freed them from slave ships on the East African coast. Indians and Chinese (1.1% of the population) account for the other permanent inhabitants.

About 1,500 expatriates live in Seychelles. Of those, about 100 are Americans, most of whom are employed at the U.S. Air Force tracking station on Mahe.

Seychelles culture is a Creole mixture of French and African influences. Creole is the native language of 94% of the people; however, use of English and French is common. English remains the language of government and commerce.

About 80% of the adult population is literate, and the literacy rate of school-aged children has risen to well over 90%. Further increase is expected, as nearly all children of primary school age attend school.

HISTORY

The Seychelles islands remained uninhabited for more than 150 years after they became known to Western explorers. The islands appeared on Portuguese charts as early as 1505, although Arabs may have visited the islands much earlier. In 1742, the French Governor of Mauritius, Mahe de Labourdonnais, sent an expedition to the islands. A second expedition in 1756 reasserted formal possession by France and gave the islands their present name in honor of the French finance minister under King Louis XV. The new French colony barely survived its first decade and did not begin to flourish until 1794, when Queau de Quincy became commandant.

The Seychelles islands were captured and freed several times during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, then passed officially to the British under the Treaty of Paris in 1814.

From the date of its founding by the French until 1903, the Seychelles Colony was regarded as a dependency of Mauritius, which also passed from French to British rule in 1814. In 1888, a separate administrator and executive and administrative councils were established for the Seychelles archipelago. Nine years later, the administrator acquired full powers of a British colonial governor, and on August 31, 1903, Seychelles became a separate British crown colony.

In March 1970, colonial and political representatives of Seychelles met at London for a constitutional convention. Elections in November 1970 brought the resulting constitution into effect. Further elections were held in April 1974, in which both major political parties campaigned for independence. Following this election, negotiations with the British resulted in an agreement by which Seychelles became a sovereign republic on June 29, 1976. These negotiations also determined that the islands of Aldabra, Farquhar, and Des Roches—which had been transferred from Seychelles in November 1965 to form part of the new British Indian Ocean Territory—would be restored to Seychelles on independence.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS

By 1963, political parties had developed in the Seychelles Colony. The elections held that year were contested for the first time on party lines. The following year, two new parties, the Seychelles Democratic Party (SDP) led by James Mancham, and the Seychelles People's United Party (SPUP) led by France Albert Rene, replaced existing parties. In the November 1970 elections, the SDP won 10 seats, and the SPUP won 5 in the Legislative Assembly. Under the new constitution, which was brought into effect by these elections, Mancham became the chief minister of the colony.

During the next elections, held in April 1974, the SDP increased its majority in the Legislative Assembly by 3 seats, gaining all but 2 of the 15 seats. Demarcation of constituencies was such that the SDP achieved this majority by winning only 52% of the popular vote.

The SDP and SPUP formed a coalition government in June 1975 to lead Seychelles to independence. The British Government was asked to appoint an electoral review commission so that divergent views on the electoral system and composition of the legislature could be reconciled. As a result, 10 seats were added to the Legislative Assembly, 5 to be nominated by each party. A cabinet of ministers was also formed, consisting of 8 members of the SDP and 4 members of the SPUP, with Chief Minister Mancham becoming prime minister. With independence on June 29, 1976, Mancham assumed the office of president, and Rene became prime minister.

Although the coalition appeared to operate smoothly, political divisions between the two parties continued after independence. On June 5, 1977, during Mancham's absence at the London Commonwealth Conference, supporters of Prime Minister Rene overthrew Mancham in a smoothly executed coup and installed Rene as president. President Rene suspended the constitution and dismissed the Parliament. The country was ruled by decree until June 1979, when a new constitution was adopted.

Under the constitution, the only recognized party is the Seychelles People's Progressive Front, an amalgam of the SPUP and several smaller political groups. The constitution provides for a strong executive headed by a president, who appoints ministers, and a People's Assembly of 23 elected members and a few appointed members. The legislature's primary purpose is to rule on proposals presented by the executive. The chief justice is appointed by the president. Judges other than the chief justice are appointed by the president in consultation with the chief justice.

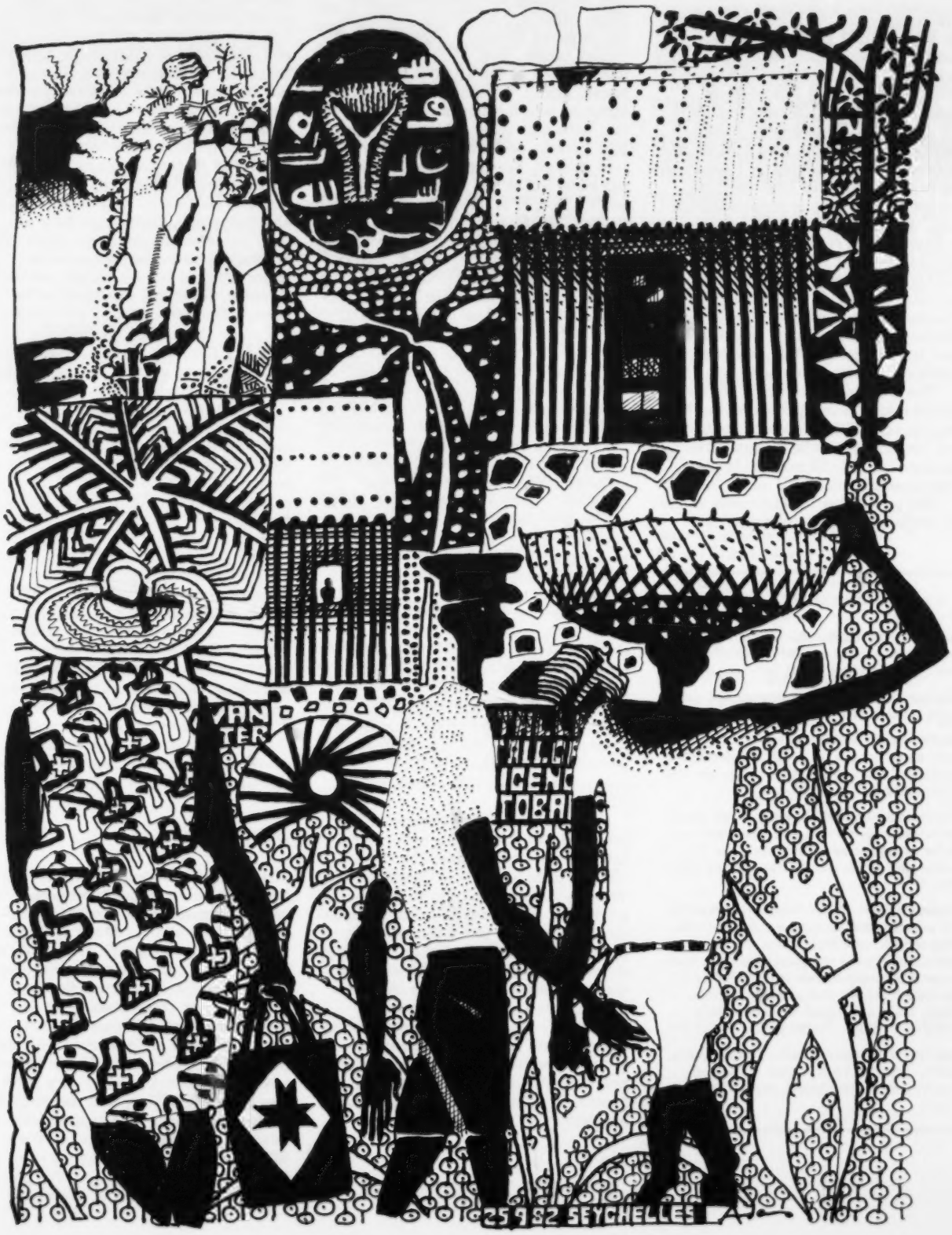
In November 1981, a group of mercenaries attempted to overthrow the Rene government but failed when they were detected at the airport and repulsed. The government was threatened again by an army mutiny in August 1982. The mutiny was quelled after 2 days, when loyal troops, reinforced by Tanzanian forces, recaptured rebel-held installations.

Principal Government Officials

President—France Albert Rene

Ministers
Youth and Defense—Ogilvie Berlouis
Education and Information—James Michel
National Development—Jacques Hodoul
Labor and Social Services—Joseph Belmont
Planning and External Relations—France Albert Rene
Health—Esme Jumeau

Departments in the President's Office
Finance and Industries—Guy Morel
Transport and Civil Aviation—James Ferrari
Personnel and Management—Simone Testa



A depiction of the local atmosphere by resident artist Michael Adams.

ECONOMY

The opening of the international airport on Mahe in 1971 dramatically transformed the Seychelles economy. Tourism is now the most important sector, accounting directly for 15% of gross domestic product (GDP) and indirectly for up to 40%. Employment, foreign earnings, construction, and banking and commerce are dominated by tourism and related industries. In 1983 and 1984, tourist arrivals rose to about 60,000 per year, up about 20% from the global recession years of the early 1980s. Current hotel capacity and service infrastructure can accommodate 80,000 tourists annually. The Seychelles Government is seeking to strengthen improved air connections, establish a local hotel training school, and construct additional tourist accommodations.

The traditional plantation economy has atrophied to insignificance. In 1984, exports of traditional products—copra, fish, cinnamon, vanilla, and guano—amounted to only $3 million. Imports were about $65 million.

The government is concerned about overdependence on tourism and is attempting to diversify by developing new industries and revitalizing traditional exports. Fisheries, for example, are targeted for major expansion as an export earner. Most of the current annual catch of 4,000 metric tons is consumed locally. Government development strategy, which includes construction of the Mahe east coast fishing port, places high priority on harbor facilities and cold storage. Foreign vessels licensed by the government are permitted to fish within Seychelles' 518,000-square kilometers (200,000-sq. mi.) exclusive economic zone. In 1985, over 80,000 tons of tuna were taken in Seychelles' waters. Seychelles has also undertaken joint ventures with other countries and international organizations in fisheries and has received foreign assistance for fishing projects. France has provided tuna boats; the United Kingdom and the Federal Republic of Germany have assisted on a processing plant; and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization is supporting research on tuna fishing.

In 1980, the government established a parastatal corporation to develop Seychelles' isolated outer islands. These small coral islands offer possibilities for agricultural development and guano production, but, to date, the remoteness of these islands has impeded their development.

The limited manufacturing sector is composed of some 60 small plants for processing copra, vanilla, fish, and essential oils for export, as well as import substitution industries. These include a brewery, a soft drink plant, a cigarette factory, furniture making, and a plastics factory. The manufacturing sector, including public utilities, accounts for about 10% of Seychelles' GNP.

The Government of Seychelles has prepared and published a series of national development plans. The current 1985–86 plan, adopted in December 1984, seeks to expand Seychelles' productive base through greater emphasis on agriculture and fisheries, while promoting tourism. This plan places less stress than past plans on infrastructure and social services, although most new investments are to be government financed. Goals include the expansion of home ownership, slower population growth, greater employment opportunities through labor development, and greater Seychellois participation in the economy.

One significant factor in recent years has been the introduction and subsequent growth of parastatal companies. The first parastatal was created in 1979, and was responsible for public transportation. By 1982, there were 30, representing all sectors of the economy. Also, by 1982, public sector employment surpassed private sector employment. In 1984, the government created the Seychelles Marketing Board, which will manage direct importation of basic commodities and control private imports of all other goods. Parastatals have not been the efficient, profitable concerns as originally planned and have become a major financial burden on the rest of the economy. However, according to the current development plan, parastatals and other government enterprises will remain a significant sector, absorbing 80% of planned government investment during the 1985–89 period.

Traditionally, Seychelles has incurred a trade deficit because of the need to import nearly all agricultural and manufactured commodities. Deficits have been offset by tourism earnings, private capital investment, remittances from overseas Seychellois, overseas borrowing, and foreign aid. Although the United Kingdom, France, and the United States have provided most of Seychelles' external assistance, the Seychelles Government is pursuing grants and loans aggressively from various international donors.

Six international banks maintain branches in Seychelles. The rupee is pegged to the International Monetary Fund's special drawing rights and remains one of Africa's most stable and convertible currencies. Seychelles has no currency or exchange controls.

DEFENSE

The Seychelles People's Defense Forces comprises three infantry companies, one naval company, and a small air wing with total strength of about 1,000 persons. From 1979 through 1983, a Tanzanian infantry company numbering about 200 was stationed in Seychelles on a contract basis. Most training for Seychellois Armed Forces personnel has been conducted in Tanzania, Cuba, the Soviet Union, and India. North Korean advisers stationed in Seychelles have also provided military and paramilitary training. The army is equipped with Soviet-made small arms and light artillery weapons and several varieties of armored cars. The navy has four patrol boats—two French and two Soviet

Travel Notes

Customs: US citizens entering Seychelles need a passport but no visa. Health requirements change; check latest information.

Climate and clothing: Light, tropical clothing is suitable year round. Ties are not worn.

Health: Public health and sanitation facilities, while good, are not up to US standards, but Seychelles' size and isolation reduce the risk of contracting tropical diseases.

Telecommunications: Seychelles has excellent telegraphic service, and direct-dial service for international calls is available. Victoria is nine time zones ahead of eastern standard time.

Transportation: Mahe Airport is served by five international air carriers. A few cruise ships call en route from India or South Africa. Interisland transportation from Mahe to the other main islands is provided by Air Seychelles, ferries, and private launches. Buses, taxis, and rental cars are readily available on Mahe. Traffic moves on the left.

Tourist attractions: Beaches, water sports, Marine National Park, Valley of May on Praslin Island, Bird Island, and Aldabra refuge.

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

Benedict, Burton. *People of the Seychelles.* London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966.

Franda, Marcus F. *The Seychelles: Unquiet Islands.* Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1982.

Lionnet, Guy. *The Seychelles.* Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1972.

Mancham, James. *Paradise Raped.* London: Methuen, 1983.

Otheimer, John M., ed. *The Politics of the Western Indian Ocean Islands.* New York: Praeger, 1975.

Sauer, Jonathan D. *Plants and Man on the Seychelles Coast: A Study in Biogeography.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967.

Stoddart, D.R. and Westroll, T.S., ed. *The Terrestrial Ecology of Aldabra.* Royal Society of London, 1979.

Thomas, Athol. *Forgotten Eden: A View of the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean.* London: Longman, 1969.

Webb, A.W.T. *Story of Seychelles.* 3d ed. Victoria: 1966.

Available from the Superintendent of Documents, US Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402:

American University. *Area Handbook for the Indian Ocean Territories.* 1971.

U.S. Department of State. *Seychelles Post Report.* February 1983.

Zhuk-class intercept craft. The air wing has a Merlin Defender surveillance craft and two Alouette helicopters. Seychelles also has a uniformed police force of 500, including a 60-member paramilitary unit, and a people's militia of about 2,000.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Seychelles follows a policy of what it describes as "positive" nonalignment and strongly supports the principle of reduced superpower presence in the Indian Ocean. The Seychelles Government is one of the proponents of the Indian Ocean zone of peace concept and actively seeks an end to U.S. presence on Diego Garcia. Seychelles' foreign policy positions have placed it generally toward the left of the spectrum within the Nonaligned Movement. The United States, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, France, India, China, and Cuba maintain embassies in Victoria. The Seychelles' permanent representative to the United Nations was accredited as ambassador to the United States in 1983. Nonresident ambassadors are accredited to the Soviet Union, France, the United Kingdom, and China.

U.S.-SEYCHELLES RELATIONS

Contacts between the U.S. Government and citizens of the United States and the people of Seychelles were infrequent until 1963, when construction began on the U.S. Air Force space-tracking station on Mahe. The U.S. Air Force, which is in charge of the station, and the civilian contractors who operate the station, have maintained good relations with the people and the government. About 15 Peace Corps volunteers are in Seychelles, and the United States provides PL–480 (Food for Peace) food aid, administered by Catholic Relief Services, for a school nutrition project. Other U.S. assistance includes $2 million annually in economic support funds and various self-help projects to individual communities.

A consulate was established in May 1976 on Mahe; after independence, the consulate was raised to embassy status. Until September 1982, the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya was also accredited to Seychelles.

Principal U.S. Official

Ambassador—Irvin Hicks

The U.S. Embassy address is fourth floor, Victoria House, Victoria, Seychelles (tel. 23921/2). ■

Published by the United States Department of State • Bureau of Public Affairs • Office of Public Communication • Editorial Division • Washington, D.C. • April 1986
Editor: Juanita Adams

Department of State Publication 8246
Background Notes Series • This material is in the public domain and may be reproduced without permission; citation of this source would be appreciated.

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402